

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Cyberbullying

Online Harassment Can Turn Deadly

By Paul Asay

Posted: March 1, 2010

What Happened:

Phoebe Prince was pretty, intelligent, 15-year-old high school student who had just accepted a date to a high school dance. An immigrant from Ireland, Prince had been in the United States for just a few months when she took her own life in January 2010.

Later, officials discovered from her classmates that Phoebe had been subjected to a withering barrage of harassing text messages and Facebook posts. Those unkind posts continued on Facebook even after Phoebe died, forcing Facebook to remove them.

In the last few years, several similar cases have gained national attention. In 2006, 13-year-old Megan Meier committed suicide after the mother of a former friend created a fake Facebook profile specifically to harass the girl. Earlier this year, another child from Massachusetts—an 11-year-old boy—killed himself after bullies called him gay.

“The real problem now is the texting stuff and the cyberbullying,” said Gus Sayer, superintendent for South Hadley School—the school Prince attended. “Some kids can be very mean toward one another using that medium.”

Bullies used to need to be physically near a victim to harass him. Thanks to the Internet, that’s no longer the case: Bullying is pervasive online, filtering into texts, e-mail and social networking. Because networks such as Facebook and MySpace form such an important part of many youths’ social lives, victims sometimes feel more embarrassed, exposed and impotent to do anything about it.

More than 30 percent of children report they’ve either been bullied or are bullies themselves. You don’t need to be big to be a bully on the Internet, and girls are as likely to engage in it as boys, experts say—perhaps more.

Talk About It:

Have you ever been bullied? Do you know someone who has? Did you tell anyone about it? Were you ever able to get the bully to stop?

Have you ever been a bully? Why do you think you did it? Did it make you feel better? Did it make you feel in control of someone else?

What's the most effective way to deal with a bully? Should schools be doing more to stop it? What can parents do for their own children who might be bullied?

What the Bible Says:

“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side” (Ps. 3:5-6).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:43-45).

“A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit...His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly” (Prov. 26:24, 26).